

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUJUMBURA 0770

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FOR AF/C CUTLER

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SCUL, BY
SUBJECT: PROPOSED CLOSING OF CULTURAL CENTER

REF STATE 258460

1. I AM DEEPLY DISTURBED BY USIA PROPOSAL REPORTED REFTEL TO CLOSE BUJUMBURA CULTURAL CENTER AND HIGHLY APPRECIATIVE OF YOUR EXCELLENT AND WELL GROUNDED REACTION TO MCGINLEY'S APPROACH. I TRUST THAT AF HAS SUPPORTED YOU IN MOVING TO HAVE TENTATIVE USIA DECISION POSTPONED PENDING FORMAL INTERAGENCY CONSIDERATION OF MATTER WHICH IS NOT A PURELY BUDGETARY PROBLEM OF HOW USIA BALANCES ITS BOOKS, BUT A QUESTION OF MAJOR POLICY IMPORTANCE IN AMERICAN-BURUNDI RELATIONS AND IN THE PROTECTION OF MOUNTING U.S. INTERESTS HERE.

2. I AM ENTIRELY SYMPATHETIC TO USIA'S FINANCIAL WOES, BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT ANY ADJUSTMENTS MADE IN AFRICAN PROGRAMS MUST BE BASED ON A CAREFUL WEIGHING OF US INTERESTS, OBJECTIVES, AND PRIORITIES AMONG VARIOUS AFRICAN COUNTRIES. FIVE YEARS AGO, ONE MIGHT HAVE ASKED VERY COLDLY, "DOES IT CONCERN THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AT ALL WHETHER BURUNDI KNOWS THAT THE UNITED STATES EXISTS OR WHAT BURUNDI THINKS OF THE UNITED STATES IN ANY CONTEXT AT ALL?" THIS REMOTE, LANDLOCKED, AND BACKWARD COUNTRY
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SUPPLIED US WITH RELATIVELY SMALL AND VERY DISPENSABLE AMOUNTS

OF COFFEE, AND WE HAD ALMOST NO EXPORTS TO IT OR INVESTMENTS IN IT. TWO YEARS AGO, ONE MIGHT HAVE OBSERVED THAT WE WOULD HAVE BEEN POSITIVELY BETTER OFF, AT LEAST IN OUR MORAL POSTURE, IF WE HAD WRITTEN BURUNDI OFF AS A HOPELESS POLITICAL MESS IN WHICH WE WERE LUCKY TO HAVE NO INTERESTS. TODAY, HOWEVER, THE SITUATION HAS CHANGED RADICALLY. BURUNDI HAS BEEN FOUND TO BE SITTING ATOP ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST RESERVES OF NICKEL (AND USEFUL RESERVES OF OTHER METALS AS WELL); AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURS ARE TAKING THE LEAD IN PLANNING FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT AND FOR INVESTMENT OF UP TO PERHAPS ONE HALF-BILLION DOLLARS; AND THE POLITICAL SITUATION HAS STABILIZED QUITE DRAMATICALLY (IF UNSATISFACTORILY FROM A HUMANITARIAN VIEWPOINT). TO BE SURE, ALL OF THIS AMERICAN BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IS AT AN EARLY STAGE OF EVOLUTION, BUT THE POTENTIAL IS CLEARLY THERE; AND ONE HAS ONLY TO LOOK AT THE SOUTH PACIFIC ARTICLE IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE TO SEE WHAT EFFECT SIMILAR NICKEL DEVELOPMENT HAS HAD ON NEW CALEDONIA IN TERMS OF LIVING STANDARDS AND TRADE.

3. WITH THE PROSPECTS FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCE AT LAST IN SIGHT, THERE HAS COME A GROWING REALIZATION AMONG LEADING BURUNDI THAT THEIR PROSPERITY IS PRIMARILY LINKED TO THE EAST AFRICAN REGION; AND THIS IN TURN, HAS LED TO AN EVER GROWING INTEREST IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE ANGLOPHONE WORLD (WHICH, IN BURUNDI, IS REPRESENTED ONLY BY THE U.S.). EVEN THOUGH LAMED BY THE ABSENCE OF A USIS PROFESSIONAL PAO, THE CULTURAL CENTER PROVIDES SOME OF THE FEW TOOLS THAT WE HAVE FOR REACHING INTO THE BURUNDI ELITE COMMUNITY OF STUDENTS AND MODERNIZED CITIZENS. THE LIBRARY IS EXTENSIVELY USED IN EDUCATIONAL CIRCLES. USIS FILMS, PARTICULARLY IN CULTURAL AND TECHNICAL AREAS AND IN REGARD TO AMERICAN HISTORY AND CURRENT PATTERNS OF LIFE, ARE HEAVILY BORROWED BY SCHOOLS IN OUTLYING DISTRICTS AS WELL AS IN BUJUMBURA. THE CENTER FURNISHES A LOCUS FOR OCCASIONAL EXHIBITS AND CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS THAT COME OUR WAY, AND THAT OFFER US A CHANCE TO FOSTER OUTWARD-LOOKING TENDENCIES IN THE LEADERSHIP GROUPS. AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM, ORGANIZED IN AND AROUND THE CENTER, IS ALWAYS OVERSUBSCRIBED BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND STUDENTS.

4. SINCE EARLY IN 1974, THE OFFICIAL US POLICY HAS BEEN TO
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NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH THE BURUNDI GOVERNMENT; AND, IN LINE WITH THIS, WE HAVE RE-ESTABLISHED OUR "SELF-HELP" PROGRAM, RESTORED OUR FULBRIGHT PROFESSOR, AND RESUMED CULTURAL EXCHANGES. I HAVE RECENTLY URGED THAT WASHINGTON GIVE FORMAL APPROVAL TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MODEST PEACE CORPS PROGRAM HERE TO CAPITALIZE ON THE ANGLOPHONE ATTRACTION AND TO INCREASE LOCALLY THE APPRECIATION OF THE FACT THAT AMERICA DOES CARE AFTER ALL ABOUT ONE OF THE WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRIES. IF A PCV PRESENCE

IS APPROVED FOR AN ENGLISH TEACHING PROGRAM IT IS OBVIOUS THAT A FULL USIS OPERATION COULD PROVIDE IMPORTANT SUPPORT. THE INSPECTORS, WHO, INCIDENTALLY, WERE VERY PLEASED WITH THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CULTURAL CENTER'S OPERATIONS, ARE RECOMMENDING THAT AN ANNUAL ECONOMIC AID LEVEL OF BETWEEN ONE-HALF AND ONE MILLION DOLLARS BE FIXED FOR BURUNDI; AND I WILL SHORTLY BE ENDORSING THIS POSITION. ALL OF THESE PROGRAMS ARE DESIGNED TO SET THE FOUNDATION FOR IMPROVED RAPPORT AND CONTACT WITH BURUNDI OFFICIALDOM IN AN ERA IN WHICH AMERICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE COUNTRY ARE HIGHLY LIKELY TO BE VERY MUCH GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE.

5. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE CLOSING OF THE CULTURAL CENTER WOULD WORK DRAMATICALLY COUNTER TO ALL THESE OTHER TENDENCIES. I HAVE ALREADY RECOUNTED ITS GREAT UTILITY IN PRESENT TERMS, BUT IT ALSO REPRESENTS A SYMBOL OF THE AMERICAN PRESENCE THROUGH THICK AND THIN. IT WAS KEPT OPEN DURING THE DEPTHS OF BURUNDI'S TROUBLES IN 1972 AND 1973 WHEN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WERE AT THEIR LOWEST EBB. THE BURUNDI AUTHORITIES COULD NOT AVOID INTERPRETING ITS DRASTIC DOWNGRADING NOW IN POLITICAL TERMS AS A SLAP IN THE FACE WHICH, MORE ELOQUENTLY THAN THE FRIENDLY WORDS IN CEREMONIAL MESSAGES FROM PRESIDENT FORD, ACCURATELY DEFINES AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS BURUNDI.

6. I HAVE ALSO LOOKED THROUGH THE FOREIGN SERVICE LIST TO SEE HOW USIA IS REPRESENTED IN POSTS MORE OR LESS COMPARABLE TO BUJUMBURA. WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT THERE ARE NO AMERICANS IN SUCH CAPITALS AS BANGUI, BANJUL, PORT LOUIS, AND KIGALI, THERE ARE ONE OR TWO AMERICANS IN SUCH CITIES AS NIAMEY, N'DJAMENA, COTONOU, LOME, MOGADISCIO, CONAKRY, LIBREVILLE, BAMAKO, FREETOWN, BLANTYRE, AND OUAGADOUGOU. PERHAPS, UNDER CURRENT FUNDS SHORTAGES, USIA IS CONTEMPLATING SOME REDUCTIONS AT THE FOREGOING POSTS, BUT, EVEN IF THAT IS THE CASE, I WONDER WHETHER THE SLASH WILL BE IN ANY
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WAY AS DRASTIC AS PLANNED FOR BUJUMBURA. AFTER ALL, WE HAVE ALREADY BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS BY HAVING

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4587

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUJUMBURA 0770

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NO RESIDENT PAO. ON THE OTHER AND, I WONDER WHETHER THE PROSPECTS FOR AMERICAN INVESTMENT AND COMMERICAL INVOLVEMENT OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS IN MANY OF THE ABOVE-NOTED COUNTRIES ARE AS SUBSTANTIAL AS IN BURUNDI. AND CERTAINLY, I BELIEVE THAT AN ACTIVE USIS PROGRAM HERE, WHICH CARRIES WITH IT EXPOSURE TO AMERICAN EFFORTS TO PROMOTE RACIAL HARMONY AT HOME, CAN CONTRIBUTE TO MORE TOLERANT AND CONCILIATORY BURUNDI POLICIES ON ITS OWN ACUTELY SENSITIVE ETHNIC PROBLEMS, WHICH HAVE ATTRACTED SO MUCH UNFAVORABLE ATTENTION IN THE U.S., AND WHICH COULD HAVE UNWELCOME REPERCUSSIONS ON EXPANDING AMERICAN BUSINESS INTERESTS HERE.

7. OTHER COUNTRIES PRESENTLY RUNNING CULTURAL CENTERS IN BUJUMBURA ARE THE SOVIET UNION, ZAIRE, AND FRANCE. CHINA HAS WANTED TO OPEN ONE OF ITS OWN FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, BUT HAS BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A SUITABLE BUILDING (A-96, LAST PARA.). I ASSUME THAT THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT THEY WOULD SNAP UP OUR BUILDING, WHICH IS WELL LAID OUT INSIDE, AND IN A CHOICE DOWNTOWN LOCATION. I HOPE THAT WASHINGTON WILL FIND AS DISTASTEFUL AS I DO THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH A CHANGE OF FLAGS AND OF MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION SERVICES, WHICH ALL WOULD NOTICE.

8. I AM CONVINCED THAT ALL OF THESE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND COMMERCIAL FACTORS SHOULD PREVAIL ON THEIR OWN MERITS TO PRESERVE THE USIS CENTER HERE INTACT, AND INDEED TO HAVE RESTORED TO US
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THE LONG-ABSENT PAO. IN ADDITION, HOWEVER, THERE IS THE FACT THAT THE ACTUAL SAVINGS WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM THE CENTER'S DEMISE, BUT WITH RETENTION OF THE SENIOR ASSISTANT (CALLOT) AND ONE OTHER LOCAL AT THE EMBASSY'S WAREHOUSE-DEPOT BUILDING, WOULD BE NEGLIGIBLE, EVEN IN USIA'S STRAITENED CIRCUMSTANCES. OUR PRESENT PROGRAM, WITHOUT A PAO, OPERATES ON A \$61,000 ANNUAL BUDGET. \$10,000 OF THIS GOES FOR RENT AND MAINTENANCE

(AT \$5,600 PER YEAR, THE CULTURAL CENTER IS ONE OF THE CHEAPEST EMBASSY RENTAL PROPERTIES). SLLARIES FOR LOCALS AMOUNT TO ABOUT \$30,000 IN THE BUDGET, BUT CALLOT GETS THE LION'S SHARE OF THIS. THE DISMISSAL OF THE LOCALS, AS PROPOSED BY MCGINELY, WOULD SAVE NO MORE THAT \$8,000. IN ADDITION, TO RELOCATE RESIDUAL USIS OPERATIONS IN OUR DEOPT-WAREHOUSE AREA COULD ACTUALLY BE EXPECTED TO RAISE USIS' SHARED ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS IN THE EMBASSY BUDGET (NOW RUNNING, WE BELIEVE, AT BETWEEN \$23 AND \$26 THOUSAND). THE DEPOT IS NOTHING MORE THAN A BIG CEMENT WALLED ROOM (PRESENTLY USED TO SHOW AMERICAN COMMERCIAL FILMS TO THE ENGLISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY), SUBDIVIDED ON ONE SIDE BY CURTAINS TO PROVIDE "CLASSROOMS" FOR ENGLISH TEACHING. MUCH WORK AND EXPENSE WOULD BE NECESSARY TO MAKE THIS INTO EVEN A NIMINALLY SATISFACTORY USIS OPERATION. THESE CALCULATIONS DO NOT RPT NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT, OF COURSE, THE CAPITAL LOSSES THAT WOULD RESULT FROM ABANDONING THE CPRESENT CENTER, INTO WHICH WE HAVE PUT SIZABLE SUMS FOR PROPERLY DESIGNED USIS FACILITIES.

9. I WISH THAT I COULD OFFER USIA SOME IDEAS FOR ECONOMIES, BUT BUJUMBURA DOES NOT PRESENT A BROAD ENOUGH PERSPECTIVE EVEN TO GENERALIZE ABOUT THIS PART OF AFRICA. WITHIN BURUNDI, OUR PROGRAM IS, AS NOTED ABOVE ALREADY AT TOO MUCH OF A BAREBONES MINIMUM LEVEL TO MAKE REDUCTIONS EITHER FEASIBLE OR MEANINGFUL. I DO NOT RPT NOT THINK IT PAROCHIAL OF ME TO URGE THE DEPARTMENT TO INSIST WITH USIA THAT THE KIND OF AMERICAN PRESENCE WHICH IS SLOWLY BUILDING UP HERE REQUIRES NOT ONLY THE RETENTION OF THE CURRENT USIS PROGRAM, BUT INDEED THE RETURN OF OUR PAO. AT THE SAME TIME I AM QUITE AWARE OF THE ADDED EXPENSE OF AN AMERICAN OFFICER HERE, AND THEREFORE, I WOULD CERTAINLY BE HAPPY TO SHARE HIM WITH KIGALI, WHERE I KNOW THAT AMBASSADOR FRITTS HAS STRONGLY URGED THAT A RESPECTABLE USIS EFFORT BE RESTORED. IT WOULD BE MUCH LESS SATISFACTORY, THOUGH BETTER THAN NOTHING AT ALL, TO HAVE A BIMONTHLY VISITOR FROM SOME REGIONAL USIS

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CENTER , SINCE SUCH AN OFFICER COULD AT LEAST LEND PROFESSIONAL ADVISE TO OUR OPERATION, EVEN IF HE COULD NOT DEVELOP THE LOCAL CONTACTS THAT ARE SO IMPORTANT. HOWEVER, IF THIS WERE THE COURSE ADOPTED, I WOULD THINK THAT A USIS OFFICER FROM NAIROBI MIGHT BE PREFERABLE TO ONE FROM KINSHASA, SINCE EXPENSE OF TRAVEL WOULD BE MUCH LESS, AND SONCE WE ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE ANGLOPHONE CONNECTION.

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